

WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL BUDGET/ MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021-22: CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Winchester City Council has to set its budget and agree the Medium Term Financial Strategy in February 2021, and we invited residents, businesses and stakeholders in the district to have their say.

The consultation ran online from 17 December 2020 to 15 January 2021. The consultation was promoted with a press release, on the council's social media platforms and in council's weekly newsletters.

We received 73 responses.

1. Priority areas

In order to understand what is most important to our residents we asked them to rank the council's five priority areas. The order of ranking is as follows:

1. Delivering high quality services
2. Ensuring a vibrant local economy
3. Providing homes for all, including building over 1,000 council homes by 2030
4. Declaring a climate emergency with our council operations to be net carbon neutral by 2024 and to be a net carbon neutral district by 2030
5. Supporting communities to 'live well'

2. Budget options

Respondents were asked how far they agree or disagree with the proposed budget options. There was general agreement for the proposals:

- Over 85% either agree or do not object to funding deficits from reserves
- Almost two-thirds agree that they financial support for the Criterium event should end
- A majority are in agreement about 'most' fees and charges and council tax increasing by 3%
- A small majority disagree with the reduction for provision for small grants for local organisations.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Not answered
Financial support for the annual cycling 'Criterium' event to end	65.8%	15.1%	19.2%	0.0%
Introduce 'cashless' parking	64.4%	16.4%	17.8%	1.4%

Increasing 'most' fees and charges by 3%	61.7%	8.2%	30.1%	0.0%
Funding any further deficits from reserves	57.6%	30.1%	12.3%	0.0%
Increasing council tax by 3%	54.8%	9.6%	35.6%	0.0%
Annual grant to the 'Play to the Crowd' (Theatre Royal) to reduce by 20%	50.7%	19.2%	28.8%	1.4%
Reduce provision for small grants to local organisations	35.6%	26.0%	38.4%	0.0%

3. Overall approach to the budget

52.1% of respondents agreed with the councils overall approach to the budget, just over a quarter (26.0%) disagreed with it.

4. Additional comments

Reduce staffing/ consultants costs
A new post for a transport movement officer - not surer what they will do and at £60K plus overheads and council car, something we could probably do without - if it was vital we would already have an officer covering this.
Some departments have already made cuts to staff & services.
Too much money is allocated to Consultants rather than using the expertise of your own employees.
I do not have the right information to make a decision. I however appreciate the great difficulties facing the Council. I could not put housing as a higher priority as although I agree with 1000 council homes I am not clear that we need endless more new homes on green field sites. I was concerned about 28 staff reductions. These are 28 staff then not paying into the local economy and possibly 28 people on benefits accompanied by further disadvantages and lack of ability to participate in social and economic activities.
To save money, the city council could do with a Head of Procurement to deal with tenders and manage contracts. This has been a very weak area within the council and much money has been wasted thanks to poor procurement and contract management in the past. This is a specialist area and as such it should be centralised instead of asking staff in policy areas to do it. Far too many consultants are engaged to undertake "studies" for the council, and they often seem to do the same or similar studies several times, as if someone in the council is repeating the work until they get the answer they want. This has got to stop. It's a huge waste of public funds, and until it's addressed I don't think you can justify raising council tax. You could ask the new Head of Procurement (see above) to oversee all engagement of consultants, to ensure that terms of reference and fee rates are appropriate, and to reduce duplication of effort.

Focus on cost reduction rather than increased taxation. Further reduce staff numbers. Focus on reducing severance and pension liabilities.

Climate emergency

Too much focus and expenditure on the "Climate Emergency". Other shorter term priorities should be prioritised given the very real and live economic and health emergency we are in.

Climate emergency is not factual and a complete waste of our council tax. It is just virtue signaling

In the current economic climate spending money on airy fairy rhetoric like 'making the council carbon neutral' and prioritising the environment is ridiculous. The most important things the council can do is to improve its own productivity to reduce the cost of services and make sure that the local economy is able to provide private sector jobs. The first priority must be that Winchester grows as an economy.

Local priorities should benefit from council tax expenditure. Spending should reflect the demographic of the local area NOT pointless national priorities or trendy woke agenda.

Appreciate it is difficult due to COVID unexpected arrival and loss of revenue but suggest climate change activity is put back on the agenda spends for the time being. Whatever you do will not satisfy everyone.

Green investments make the most financial sense.

Waste collection

Charging for green waste collections when this has always been included within our rates is immoral. You are only encouraging more fly tipping especially in the countryside. Once again rural areas are being disadvantaged in favour of city and urban areas.

Please don't cut waste collections any further.

Should not have to pay for brown bin collection as it is covered by council tax

Do not increase fees

Council tax increase is unacceptable in the present situation. I am on a fixed income and not expecting any increase in income so won't pay any additional council tax.

You must remember we have all been hit by the pandemic, to penalise local people would be horrendous.

People cannot afford a 3% rise and to even contemplate it in this current climate is ridiculous. I have always voted for you in the past but certainly won't if you put in this increase. It's time to cut costs and not increase taxes.

This year has been grim enough without increasing charges. You have built up substantial reserves over the years. It won't dent the bank to use them to help in the year of recovery.

It appears that you propose to write off debts of over £0.25m and get tax payers to cover it by imposing a 3% increase

Increase fees further

A well thought out budget at a time of considerable financial uncertainty. It would be preferable to not have to find savings from team restructures and potential redundancies. I would be in favour of increasing fees further if it meant saving jobs, and I hope many other residents would too, provided it was made explicit that the fee increases were to save jobs. Good luck with a difficult job!

Agree with council tax rises and use of reserves very annoyed about having to purchase a bin for green waste

I think the Council Tax should be increased by more than 3%.

I would like to see increased parking charges, to raise revenue and also to take another step towards the reduced carbon / climate change goals of the Council. Many of those using our city's parking do not live in the area and the lungs and pockets of residents should not be subsidising visitors' car parking. The Theatre Royal grant reaches a very niche group and should be discontinued. Otherwise I support the strategy.

Its an unusually tough year so whilst I would not normally support going to reserves, this does feel sufficiently exceptional to be a good example of what they are there for. I question whether the leisure centre could be paused or funding be achieved by eg partnering with future operator. Seems an odd priority at present, but I haven't enough detailed knowledge to judge. Is there scope fo increasing some fees by more than 3%? Or even general council tax increase by 4%?

Think it's a case of doing the previously mentioned question and make 3% increases and cutting money in certain areas, hopefully in the long term the situation will improve and the economy and environment will improve and benefit every local residents and the return of tourists etc when it's safe to do so. Bleak now and tighten the belt and will hopefully be worth the pain when we get to a positive place.

Income generation

You need some income generation from your existing assets.

A voluntary council tax is essential to raise funds for key projects and obtain extra income from benevolent wealthy residents who can shoulder it easiest

Introduce further charges to the wealthiest in the City who will have been statistically the least impacted by the pandemic. For example, 1) additional higher council tax bands for the largest properties; 2) car tax for households with high vehicle ownership which would could be further justified through environmental policy.

Priority should be selling bar end depot to reduce borrowing costs on other projects

Better use of resources/ stop wasting money

why does the council continue to waste so much money on the big projects like silver hill when it needs to make savings. leave it to the private sector!

Stop wasting money on useless surveys, consultants and the fictional "climate emergency"

Reduce over the top payments to councillors

Stop charging for things that councils are supposed to do by law ie collecting rubbish. Reintroduce weekly rubbish collections esp in summer months

Fix potholes and pavements esp in town

Re open counter service for rent payments and advice... phone service leaves you hanging on for ages

BUILD MORE COUNCIL HOUSES.. not so called affordable properties, and make them houses for LOCALS not outsiders

I could go on but with this council, they take no notice of locals!

Parking

It would be prudent to take some time over implementation of the council's parking strategy, as the council will need as much income as it can get from car parking over the next few years. Changes will have to be gradual and co-ordinated, and sequenced with improvements to bus services and walking/cycling paths etc.

It is also no good promoting park and ride, when in normal times, they are full by 8.00am in the morning, and anyone north of the city has to drive all the way round Winchester to get to them.

Parking at St Catherine's Hill free car park should be charged, albeit at a low rate. The same rate should be made available and widely advertised at the adjacent Park & Ride to encourage walkers to use that facility. For example a 'Park for a Walk' ticket to provide 2 or 3 hours parking but cannot be used on the bus service.

Please consider further increasing parking charges in the city centre and reducing charges for the park and ride, to reduce congestion and air pollution in the city centre. The river park carpark shouldn't be included in the free Sunday parking because it's accessed via the North Walls which is a busy city centre road.

Housing/ planning

Lastly, please use the city council's role as planning authority - and custodian of the Local Plan - to ensure that developers build the community infrastructure we need. Large housing estates like Kings Barton, Winchester Village, and whatever replaces Sir John Moore Barracks really must deliver more facilities for local people. The New Homes Bonus was squandered, unfortunately, as it was used to prop up the council's revenue rather than to build new infrastructure; but there is still CIL, and this is a great resource that could be used to improve facilities for the arts, culture, sport and leisure, and to build new off-road cycleways. However, developers should be asked to fill gaps in the provision of facilities for families and young people, in particular – Winchester lacks a lot of things other towns and cities have, like a soft play centre, a trampoline park, a climbing centre, crazy golf, an ice rink, an affordable/mainstream cinema, an indoor water park, or even an outdoor water park! This really has to be addressed, and that's only likely to happen if some land is used to build these facilities alongside new housing. We need new low cost housing, but communities aren't just houses....

This budget seems to do very little to address the extreme housing crisis in the Winchester area, where no local younger people stand a chance of any housing, unless they are students as so many properties are student HMO's. New developments are also at impossible prices, even with help-to- buy and part ownership schemes. Winchester is becoming a retirement home for rich old gits.

General comments

Your introduction says this questionnaire will only take 5 minutes to complete. Reading the Budget options alone will take very much longer. The implication is that this is yet another token consultation with decisions already made even if not formally ratified.

The information given on the budget pages is not clear enough to be able to make a valid judgement

I would like to see more imagination in regard to how the council, citizens, businesses and other stakeholders built a better Winchester - like the Participatory City programme in Barking and Dagenham - <https://www.weareeveryone.org/>

I recall commenting on the recent Council Strategy Document that the Strategy (such as it was) was unaffordable without a substantial increase in revenue or reduction in running costs. The current budget situation reflects that observation which has been exacerbated by the effects of the Covid pandemic and especially the shortfall in parking revenues.

The intention to draw on Transitional Reserves to balance this Budget ducks the problem of how to fund the on going costs of the Council's Strategy properly. Perhaps this is to become apparent in the next iteration of the Strategy but if not, then the longer term forecasts made here are likely to far worse.

As for the proposals to cut staff numbers now, I am surprised that no attempt has been made to offer options that cut deeper. The proposals so far seem to have "limited impact" on service delivery. Surely Council should be offered options that might make more significant financial savings even though they might have "some or even significant" impact. Only then can we determine the rigour with which this aspect of budgetary management has reviewed.

Central government needs to be pushed more to deliver on its promise that local authorities would not lose out due to Covid.

Focus effort on longer term planning the present COVID is short term but some decision may have long term implications for the environment we live and work in raising taxes for better services or maintaining investment than cutting is my preference.

In general, the other changes you suggest seem sensible. If the council engages with local charities, community groups, sports clubs and others, and makes use of their capacity, then Winchester can thrive. If the council were to commission these local organisations to do things like deliver health, well-being and sporting activities, renovate areas of public space, plant trees and wildflower areas, or even deliver tourist services, then this could save the

council money as well as boosting the local economy by supporting local enterprises and services. In short, the council could fund and partner with other local bodies, instead of trying to do everything itself.

I would like to see a budget proposal for the old River Park leisure centre site. If it is simply shuttered, it will quickly become an eyesore.

It's going to be a difficult few years, hang on in there and do your best.

It is not particularly clear from the presentation how much money is spent in 'outsourcing' rather than actually delivering - usually a more expensive option. For example, the dithering around the redevelopment by the old bus station has been egregiously mishandled. The resulting 'improvement', which leaves everybody to wait for buses with negligible shelter is a real slap in the face for parents with small children, elderly people, and everybody else not keen to have to get soaked/roasted/frozen depending on the vagaries of the UK weather.

The Economy is key in ensuring services can be provided, need to help economy and support jobs first

The focus of budget expenditure should be on services and outcomes that the Council is best placed to deliver and where it can have the greatest impact. Other discretionary spend (eg green waste collection) should be charged to residents at cost.

The proposed marketing of council owned land which could be used for housing without land can't see how you will achieve building 1000 affordable housing by 2030

Winchester Council should cut its cloth to deliver services to residents based on the income it receives rather than simply increasing council tax by the maximum each year. If parking income is down the services should be reduced. Many councils have undertaken a review of "statutory services only" - if it's not statutory and we haven't got the money then it should be done - simple economics.